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The Neptune Academy: Honors Students Give Back

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In August of 2008, two faculty members of the University of Central Arkansas Honors College were charged by their dean, Rick Scott, with designing a summer academy for local teens deemed to be at academic risk. The central goal of the program would be to offer selected honors college upperclassmen—beneficiaries of full-ride scholarships, compelling interdisciplinary seminars, and close faculty mentoring—an opportunity to share with struggling youngsters their pre-professional training as well as their own gifts of character and personality. Our hope was that the experience might serve as a meaningful intervention in the lives of adolescent students.

What resulted from the planning conducted by honors faculty members Doug Corbitt and Allison Wallace was a pilot for the Neptune Academy, launched in August 2009, and described herein by Corbitt and Wallace. Also included are reflections on the experience by two of the eight honors college students who served as the teaching staff: Corey Womack (a senior at the time in digital filmmaking) and Patrick Russell (a junior English major). We offer as well the following appendices: a sample schedule for a day of the Academy; registration forms; and a "what-to-expect" letter, sent out just before the start of the Neptune Academy. A six-minute video of highlights from the academy is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWmxAIIZU_Y>.

DOUG SPEAKS

Suppose you were to take eight honors students and give them the task of designing a week-long day-camp for rising eighth-graders who have been identified by their teachers as struggling learners. Tell the honors students that they are to make learning exciting and fun for youngsters who just know that learning is anything but exciting and fun. What do you get?

You get a lesson on observing well in preparation for writing poetry. The youngsters are seated in a circle in the woods, and Patrick asks them to look closely at their surroundings, to describe what they see. To look more closely. Over here. In the direction of a downed tree, not more than fifteen feet away. And suddenly, the rotting log stands up and walks toward us. We all jump, shriek, exclaim, and burst into embarrassed laughter. It was Patrick's friend

Michael, mud- and leaf-daubed into a convincing semblance of woodland debris. Had we actually seen what we thought we had seen? What might we have seen if we had looked closer?

You get a lesson on clear, descriptive writing in which the youngsters have to find, gather, and describe a range of objects without revealing the particular items under consideration. The honors students must then attempt to identify, on the basis of each description, the right object from a rather extensive collection.

You get lessons on paper-making, film theory, storytelling, habitat construction, cooking, plant identification, animal tracking, musical improvisation, and star-gazing.

And you get to see the dazzling gifts of extraordinary young adults as they introduce others to a world of wonder and magic, of light and color, of laughter and friendship. In short, you get the Neptune Academy.

The Background

A confluence of factors led to the Neptune Academy. First came the sense of shared values that has emerged among the members of the honors faculty. Through our conversations and joint labors, we have come to think of ourselves as in the business of promoting human flourishing not just for the high-ability students in our program but for everyone. We challenge our students to take seriously the idea that "each of us is better off when all of us are better off," and we urge them to look for concrete, practical ways to strengthen their communities and reach out to others. Such appeals leave us little room for inaction ourselves.

Second came the dream of the UCA Honors College's founding director, Norb Schedler, to create a summer academy that would involve university honors students. Schedler's vision centered on training secondary school teachers in gifted and talented (GT) programs. In such an academy, honors students would serve as teaching assistants to faculty, modeling elements of the UCA Honors College pedagogy such as student presentations and collaborative projects to GT teachers, who in turn would receive graduate credits. The academy was planned as a collaborative project with the College of Education. The vision was ambitious and needed substantial funding, but the money did not come, and other priorities arose to supplant this one.

Our current dean, Rick Scott, sought the development of a summer program geared to adolescents who were bright but at risk of not attending college. He imagined an academy that would embody the joy of discovery and inspire its attendees to future college enrollment. As in Schedler's vision, honors students would contribute as teaching assistants, working with the young, summer academicians to introduce ideas and ways of knowing and learning that would open them to a larger world. Scott imagined that the parents would be schooled, as well, in topics such as how to create a productive study environment in the home, how to help their child prepare for standardized tests,

and how to learn what scholarships and other sources of financial aid were available.

In 2005, two honors students, Danielle Sterrenberg and Kerry Wilkins Snook, produced a thesis under Scott's direction entitled "Preparing for the Lively Experiment: University of Central Arkansas Honors College Summer Academy." The thesis outlined a week-long curriculum modeled on components of honors core courses taught during the freshman and sophomore years at UCA, and it proposed a hands-on approach that had students performing, doing experiments, writing, and taking field trips, all under mentorship of honors student teaching assistants and an academy director. A 2006–07 grant application to fund the summer academy did not succeed, and in 2008 Scott asked the authors of this article to develop a new grant proposal for the academy. The assignment led to the Neptune Academy, and it occurred a year earlier than expected.

The final factor was a serendipitous presentation at the honors college by visiting speaker Ronald Simons, a professor of sociology at the University of Georgia. Simons and his research team had conducted a longitudinal study of 179 boys and their parents to test hypotheses derived from two contrasting theories. One is the **latent trait theory,** which holds that "continuity of deviant behavior [from childhood into adolescence and adulthood] is an expression of an underlying social trait" (218), e.g., failure to learn self-control, impulsivity, insensitivity, shortsightedness (219). The second is the **life-course theory,** which holds that "childhood antisocial behavior has a corrosive effect on social relationships that serve as informal social controls. [These effects] in turn accentuate involvement in deviant behavior" (218). The team's findings: (1) a strong correlation between childhood oppositional/defiant behavior and adolescent delinquency but also (2) "no significant association between these two variables once the effects of quality of parenting, school commitment, and affiliation with deviant peers were taken into account" (237). In other words, if the boys' parents received guidance and education about dealing with oppositional/defiant behavior, or if at least one teacher or counselor demonstrated manifest interest in the child, or if the boys became affiliated with more conventional peer groups, the correlation between childhood oppositional/defiant behavior and adolescent delinquency disappeared.

This was good news! The right sorts of interventions can make a significant difference in a youngster's life.

Armed with the over-arching vision of the honors college and the encouraging results of Simons' research, we set out to identify the particular needs of struggling learners in our geographic area, central Arkansas.

Jay Barth, Ima Graves Peace Professor of Politics at nearby Hendrix College, was involved in research that yielded two helpful reports in 2008: (1) the final report of the Governor's Task-Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs and (2) a study sponsored by the Clinton School of Public Policy, Hendrix College, and several other organizations on what Arkansas is doing to close the achievement gap.

Barth and Nitta found that "summer learning loss and unproductive time between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. [during the school year] are key causes of the achievement gap in Arkansas" (3). They cited many examples of after-school and intensive summer programs across the nation that have helped low-achieving students not only to increase proficiency in, say, reading, but also to catch up to their peers. However, the studies also revealed that there is no statewide initiative for after-school and summer programs in Arkansas and that nearly one in five Arkansas schoolchildren are left to take care of themselves after returning home from school (29–30).

Moreover, Mark Cooper, a colleague in the College of Education at UCA, informed us that the university's Mashburn Institute sponsored a number of programs targeting struggling learners in the elementary grades and a few programs targeting high-school age students but nothing in the middle-school years.

Cooper put us in touch with the Office of Alternate Learning Environments at the Arkansas Department of Education, and the director, Lori Lamb, was excited to hear of our plan to address low achievement in middle-schoolers by giving them young-adult "professors"—university Honors students. She told us that she has over three hundred middle-school students in the Conway area alone whom she would like to place in a program such as the Neptune Academy. But we wanted to test the idea on a smaller number of children and only (for the time being) youngsters with no record of serious behavioral problems; Simons *et al.* notwithstanding, we thought it unwise to us to expect our young-adult honors students to cope with significant levels of adolescent oppositional/defiant behavior. Lamb suggested that we try to identify youngsters who scored at or above the eightieth percentile on benchmark exams at some point between fourth and seventh grade; whose scores in the last one or two testing cycles had dropped markedly; and who had no record of serious behavioral problems.

Thus we approached the counselors at the two middle schools in our town with a proposal to match eight of our honors students with approximately twenty-four of their academically at-risk middle-schoolers in a pilot program that we had come to call the Neptune Academy. We found the staff at one school enthusiastically receptive but the staff at the other completely uninterested.

ALLISON SPEAKS

As with any major endeavor, there's the vision on the one hand and the reality of its implementation on the other. Let's take these one at a time:

The Vision

We envisioned hiring and training eight honors upperclassmen to work with twenty-four rising eighth-graders thought to be academically at risk. The plan was to create an intensive, week-long summer experience "in the woods" with an environmental education curriculum designed and delivered by the team of "Young Professors" (YPs). This intensive week would then be followed by

regular, frequent contact throughout the subsequent school year between each of the YPs and three academy participants apiece, matched to their respective honors mentors by gender. We considered this relatively small cohort a good size for the pilot program since we preferred to take baby steps and succeed rather than giant strides and risk failing. We fully expected to discover flaws in the academy's first year that would need rethinking in future years.

We decided to put college students to the task rather than teaching the summer academy ourselves for several reasons: with a team of Young Professors, the gap in age would be considerably smaller; the middle-schoolers would see teens not much older than themselves getting excited about learning; and they would see teens who have "made it," who have gotten through high school and into college and who have begun to take control of their own destinies.

We wanted to schedule the academy for the last week of summer vacation so that youngsters would begin the school year with a rousing "send off" of sorts and so that the follow-up contact between them and their YP mentors could begin while the youngsters were in school and (possibly) getting re-acquainted with their academic demons.

We decided to create a two-credit college course, led by Doug Corbitt and me, that was required for the selected YPs and that met once weekly throughout the spring 2009 semester. In this course, Doug and the YPs would work their way through at least one contemporary text on the subject of adolescent development in an effort to understand what sorts of youngsters they might find themselves working with: adolescents given to impulsive behavior, for example, or struggling with esteem issues or perhaps grappling already with addiction. We also expected to tap education and psychology professionals for short class visits to share their insights and expertise.

Parallel in time with the unfolding of this course, we envisioned requiring each of the YPs to identify a faculty member on our campus who would be willing to meet periodically to discuss lessons that the honors student would work up, lessons stemming from each student's own primary interests and expertise. We were envisioning selecting honors students with particular interests and background in environmental sciences and/or humanities-oriented approaches to the environment.

In choosing our Young Professors, we decided to advertise the eight positions in the fall of 2008, providing a description of the academy vision and the two-credit training course. We would ask prospective applicants to tell us why they wanted to be part of such a program, what skills and background (both academic and personal) they could bring to it, and what kinds of lessons they could imagine teaching within it. Doug and I would then review applications received by the posted deadline (early November) and select the best eight from among them.

To assemble the first academy cohort of youngsters, we believed we could tap the guidance counselors at our city's two middle schools to help us identify a likely pool of rising at-risk eighth-graders. We intended to compare seventh-

grade students' standardized test scores with their elementary school performance, hoping to identify those kids who had begun their academic lives well but who, for whatever reason, had begun seriously to falter.

We pictured securing the use of a developed camp facility located within an hour's drive of Conway and with such amenities as indoor sleeping areas, indoor plumbing, dining hall, trails, and a lake (i.e., plenty of nature to study). We wanted easy vehicle access in the event of accident or illness requiring quick transport to a hospital, but we also wanted to stage this week "in the woods." We assumed that academically at-risk youngsters would associate schoolrooms and buildings with unpleasant experiences. A week spent mostly outdoors and away from institutional settings seemed more likely to rekindle in these kids the idea they probably had in kindergarten, that learning can be fun.

We knew we would need to secure funding—and permission as well as insurance coverage from the university—for all of the above, so we drew up a preliminary budget of about $30,000, to give us a goal to aim for.

Finally, we decided on the name "Neptune Academy" because, several years back, physicists in California made the experimental discovery that atmospheric conditions on the planet Neptune are such that it literally *rains diamonds.* We wanted to create conditions for a handful of struggling adolescents in which something sparkly—something precious—would happen.

The Reality

We picked a bad year to launch a program that, ideally, required some $30k. Thanks to the Great Recession, the grants we wrote came to no avail, and the funding we sought through existing sources at the State Department of Education failed to materialize.

We might have had better luck had we put off launching the Academy until summer 2010, but we were eager to try at least a pilot project. Also, we did have access to about $12k in internal grants with which to hire the YPs, and we had an eager pool of prospective applicants—honors students who had gotten wind of the idea that was taking shape—wanting to take part in this exciting vision. As it happens, had we waited to do this in 2010, the $12k would not have been available to us due to the university's massive budget cuts early in 2009–10.

We did manage, then, to hire eight wonderful YPs, two of whom had once themselves been struggling learners. All eight were not, however, prepared to offer environmental education; one was a political science major, another was a philosophy major, and a third was majoring in digital filmmaking. Thus some re-thinking of the original curriculum vision was in order. We also managed to create the two-credit course, which met one night a week for the duration of the spring semester; throughout that time we worked our way through Sheryl Feinstein's 2007 book, *Teaching the At-Risk Teenage Brain.* The YPs also brainstormed lessons and recreational-activity ideas, and they periodically debriefed everyone on what they were learning from working with their faculty mentors.

As it became clear that major grants would not, after all, be forthcoming, we were forced to drop the idea of a camp facility in the woods for overnight use and to recast the majority of the intensive week we envisioned as a day camp on our own campus, with lunches at the university cafeteria covered by a participation fee of $75 that each youngster's family would pay. (We offered to scholarship any student who wanted to participate but who needed financial aid; no one turned out to need it.) Sundry other expenses remained to be covered, such as the cost of having T-shirts printed with the Neptune Academy logo. We were able to cover these expenses by means of an internal UCA Foundation account that had been established in previous years by university development efforts and earmarked for use by the honors college.

Funding constraints, as well as a general petering out of leads we had sought, also prevented us from asking education and psychology professionals from around the state to visit our spring course. We later realized that at least two or three faculty on our own campus might have been useful; tapping them is on the "things to do differently next time" list. The only staff the Neptune Academy ever had were Doug (Director) and me (Assistant Director), and we did not pay ourselves for the work of the academy itself, the time spent planning it, or the teaching overload occasioned by the two-credit training course.

With a day camp, we would need no residential space; we could use of one or two campus buildings for some of the indoor lessons and any outdoor part of campus that we wished. The outdoor space happens to include a twenty-acre parcel of woods and prairie—the Jewel E. Moore Nature Reserve—so some lessons and recreational activities could easily be held "in the woods" after all.

Thanks to the little bit of internal funding to which we had access, we managed to get away from campus as a group for one overnight camping trip at a nearby state park. Camping gear aplenty was begged or borrowed, but food had to be purchased and the camp site rented. Ultimately, the pilot program of the Neptune Academy cost about $15k—half what had originally been envisioned.

Recruiting for eighth-graders did not go quite as well as hoped; rather than the desired twenty-four, we eventually had ten register to participate. One of the city's two middle schools never responded to our invitation to work with us, and, although administrators at the other school were happy to partner with us, we did not find many youngsters eager to include "school" in their summer plans, at least not if that school were offering no credits toward graduation. Each student who did register to participate was required to submit a handful of forms, described in Appendix B.

The gender breakdown was such that we ended up matching the six male YPs to the six boys and dividing the four girls between the two female honors students. Although the youngsters knew ahead of time that they would be assigned a YP mentor, we did not make these assignments public until the end of the intensive week of the academy experience in order to ensure positive group dynamics all around; that is, every eighth-grader had plenty of opportunity to engage and interact equally with every Young Professor.

Opening day was on a Sunday. As parents arrived with their teens, they were asked to complete a few short, additional forms that gave us, for example permission to videotape their children. Then Doug addressed parents as a group in one room while the YPs set about breaking the ice with the youngsters in the adjoining room. To judge by the raucous laughter that soon ensued from that quarter, not a whole lot of ice needed breaking. It quickly became clear that the entire group—teens and young adults together—were going to get along very well, on the whole, even as the occasional youngster might, over the course of the week, try the patience of the occasional Young Professor.

Doug has alluded to some of the academic lessons that transpired as the week progressed. What he did not mention was his own decision to begin each day by gathering the seated group in a circle around him for a brief discussion of a "word for the day"—such as "dedication" or "imagination." As each new day began, Doug would ask the group to recall the concepts that had been introduced on previous days so that by the end of the week the youngsters could easily recite the entire list. By this strategy Doug was essentially inviting everyone to reflect repeatedly on the various concepts and to be mindful of them throughout the week's many lessons and recreational interludes.

The week wrapped up back on campus on Saturday with a short, informal "awards" ceremony, in which every teen was presented with a certificate, and after which families, Neptune Academy staff, and key university administrators gathered for a celebratory cookout and group photograph.

That was in August 2009, just days before the new school year began. Subsequently, YPs began Facebooking, emailing, texting, or calling their assigned youngsters, occasionally joining them at their middle-school football games or taking them out for ice cream.

COREY SPEAKS

I now consider my time with the eighth-grade students at the Neptune Academy to be my best days at UCA.

However, as much as I enjoyed the spring semester of preparation for the camp, I remember that—as the summer began winding down, the scheduled week approached, and I saw the toils of my senior year quickly following on its heels—I wasn't as excited about the prospect of giving up the last week of my summer. With two senior film assignments, graduate school applications, and an honors thesis to complete, I couldn't muster much positive attitude about the academy when August rolled around.

But when the day came and we started our ice-breaking games with the ten kids, my apprehension melted away. I was already comfortable with my friends, the other Young Professors, but what surprised me was how quickly the eigth-graders opened up to us. They were laughing and taking part in the games within a few minutes. I had expected a general mood of reluctance and anger. Had I been thrown at that age into an "academic summer camp" on the last week of summer vacation, I would have been furious. However, these students seemed excited and eager to learn.

My second big surprise came later that night. I had planned a lesson for the group around the film *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As the movie rolled, I had trouble focusing. Tom Robinson's trial seemed to wear on for hours. By the time Boo Radley saved the Finch children, I was certain that my first lesson would fail; this movie was much too slow for these middle-schoolers. When the film was over, I stood in front of the group and asked them what they liked about it. I got the usual answers of "Atticus," "the trial," "Boo Radley." I asked the group what they thought the title of the story meant. The classroom was silent for a moment, convincing me I would never be able to teach anyone anything. But then—

> "It means we shouldn't hurt or wrong something if they only do good things for others."
>
> "No. . . . Didn't it have two stories? I mean, we shouldn't do that, but doesn't the part about Tom mean we shouldn't judge people? He didn't hurt that girl, but they sent him to jail just because he was black."

I was stunned. They nailed it: in two quick statements these kids cut to the heart of one of the most morally challenging stories of the twentieth century. I had underestimated them, and their ability and eagerness to learn continued to floor me for the next week. These children weren't fazed by any idea or task we put before them; they might not always understand or excel, but they always tried, and they were always willing to do something new.

My week at the academy sparked another line of thought about the other Young Professors. All of us are members of the University of Central Arkansas Honors College. During my four years at UCA, I have witnessed a certain perverse stigma that comes with being in honors. The rest of the student body and some of the faculty insist on putting you on an academic pedestal, which doesn't always work to your advantage. I had never believed in this stigma. I consider honors students to be the same as all other university students—or, at least, I did.

I began to witness the difference during our spring semester of planning. Here were eight upper-level students meeting once a week, discussing lesson plans and a camping trip to share with youngsters they had yet to meet at a camp that might never—because of a lack of funding—be realized. Now, most college students have trouble remembering much before last weekend and thinking about much after next weekend. But our ability to exercise forethought is one reason honors students are better prepared to take on a project like the Neptune Academy. We spent an entire semester planning extensively, but, when the week of reckoning finally arrived, we realized many details were still uncertain. Had our group not been composed of borderline-obsessive perfectionists, the week would have surely crashed.

As I attended academy lessons led by other Young Professors throughout the week, I was continually impressed with the excitement and new perspectives they brought to subjects that even I would normally consider, well, boring.

Eric, for example, taught the students about The Prisoner's Dilemma—an intricate, intense philosophical concept proving that, in the long run, society will fare better with cooperation than competition. However, Eric didn't introduce this concept with a hefty lecture or by thumbing through a great philosophical tome. Eric taught the students a card game, wherein they could either guarantee their own individual survival by condemning a partner or they could cooperate. Within a few minutes the children understood that points added up much faster if they consistently cooperated.

Another Young Professor, Jeremy, taught a lesson about the formation of the planet and life as we know it. He had the students create a chalk timeline covering just over a kilometer of campus sidewalks. Jeremy stepped off the epochs and eras, calling out the major events in biological and geological history. The kids marked the line and drew a small cartoon illustrating the formation of water or the first single-celled organism. The entire project was very impressive, but most impressive was the last major event Jeremy illustrated, the appearance of humanity. After walking more than a kilometer, we found that recorded history took up no more than a centimeter of chalk. When the kids stepped back and grappled with this realization, the group as a whole seemed to gasp; you could look in their eyes and witness the event of learning. You could see fireworks going off in their heads. In this moment I realized what makes honors students different from other college kids and why they might be better prepared to lead a program like the Neptune Academy.

Like the young people they too once were, honors students still enjoy learning; we love knowledge and making connections. Many college students, their high school experience having killed something within them, look at class as that annoying time between naps, but honors students understand the beauty that comes from a classroom or a library or a science lab. Something has happened to us in our lives, making us want to know all we can about our environment and ourselves. Whereas the average college student looks to school as a chore, the honors student understands the inherent beauty that comes with knowledge. We know that life is better when you understand the hows and whys of the world. Witnessing the small epiphanies that come with learning—in both my fellow Young Professors and a bunch of jumping middle-schoolers—was well worth the last week of my summer.

PATRICK SPEAKS

People care, and people care that you care. Young teens really do care about their futures, about their hobbies, interests, and studies, and they desperately want others—their parents, friends, teachers—to care about that care. As fundamentally social beings, we crave this affirmation. A sense of community is vital to our development. Yet despite our individual cries for it, we ourselves often forget to dispense it to others. The teacher ignores the quiet whimpers of her student. The dad turns off his ears to turn on that night's football game. The friend talks more of himself.

But in honors, we remember the Other. We bow in humility before the Other and the possibilities we can have together. We give her the time of day because we recognize the sheer beauty of the Other—the fact that she sees the world in a completely different way, that she helps contribute to the whole process of the world, that she holds the special capacity to create, and that, if an honest person, she helps us realize who we are and what we believe.

And so, in the Neptune Academy, we Young Professors actively engaged the students, letting them know that we cared, that we were genuinely interested in their concerns, that we wanted them to actualize their self-created possibilities or first to dare even dream of those possibilities. And boy, I saw the Other. Once I got past their OTD (Obsessive Texting Disorder), I saw wonderful kids who could be terribly excited about life and what they found dear within it. Eighth-graders bragging about what instruments they play, what disciplines they study, what professions they wish to pursue, how fast they can text: put them in the classroom, and, once their excessive energy wears off a bit, they feed you diamonds. I was amazed at the profound insights these kids had at such a young age. I handed them concepts and lessons that I wrestle with today, and these young students grabbed them, took off, and soared.

We must pass on to our younger generations a capacity for seeing the wide world in all its magnificence and all its ugliness, too. This capacity is not an innate trait, biologically bestowed by indifferent genes; rather, it needs to be harnessed and cultivated through education that mirrors the real world. Not only did I want my Neptune Academy students to open their eyes and see, to stand in awe before it all, but also to feel compelled to act. I guess I wanted to pass on the honors bug of being a "Global Citizen."

The academy wasn't all roses. Hyper eighth-graders will drive sluggish college students crazy at times. Their attention can instantly make you focus on some random, irrelevant thing. Cody, for instance, during Doug's morning pep-talk about integrity, yelled "Microwave!" when he saw a college student carrying one down the hall. These youngsters will blatantly tell you, during your lesson, that they are bored, and they will ask you serious questions from which you cannot run and which you cannot cover over with ready-made comments. They will ask you about God, about dating, and they might tell you disturbing secrets about themselves or their homes.

But we Young Professors held fast to our patience. What we saw in every one of our students was a light, a flicker of amazing possibility, and we gave them the tools to cultivate that light, to tend to it, to enlarge it. We showed that we cared. We introduced them to the excitement and wonder of education—not classroom education, but real-world education. We tried to open their eyes, and I say that, if we only woke up one of them, we succeeded. I with always remember the joy and thankfulness I felt when I saw some of these kids "light up," when they fed me diamonds, made daring comments, or offered astute insights, when they discovered passions they had not known until they met me and my fellow Young Professors.

DOUG SPEAKS

A pilot program is just that: an experiment to see if an idea has legs. The week in August 2009 revealed much that could and should be done differently as well as much that will be worth repeating when the Neptune Academy becomes a more fully realized endeavor. Here are a few of our lessons learned:

1. **Ask the right follow-up questions in the right way.**

   Honors students are accustomed to having their answers challenged with follow-up questions and comments designed to elicit any shortcomings in their remarks. Struggling middle-schoolers are not. We found that aggressive use of the Socratic method—however cheerfully and supportively practiced—prompted high levels of anxiety and frustration and tended to shut down the happy give-and-take of inquiry. A more effective approach, we think, is a welcoming response to every answer coupled with enthusiastic appeals for ways to check or test the answer. This strategy has two great benefits: it fosters participation by reducing the risk of embarrassment for self-conscious teens, and it cultivates the intellectual virtue of analyzing and assessing one's own thinking.

2. **Be prepared for the inevitable snafus and take advantage of them.**

   The most careful planning will not eliminate equipment failures, experiments that go awry, and crafts that take some students much longer to learn or complete than others. The attendant irritations, annoyances, and distractions, however, can be reduced by assigning one or two Young Professors a "back-up" role at each activity and by equipping them with a generous supply of games, logic puzzles, stories-with-holes, and the like. In the event that nothing goes wrong, the "back-ups" can, through unmistakable signs of interest, help keep attention focused on the task at hand.

3. **Be mindful of energy levels.**

   Energy levels are extraordinarily high in the morning and at the beginning of a week-long program. They tend to wane as the day or the week progresses. Scheduling the more intense activities accordingly promotes more willing participation in all activities.

4. **Not all complaints are signs of problems.**

   The youngsters, for example, expressed some dismay that we only provided healthy snacks, but each day they consumed the abundant supply of fresh fruits, nuts, and baked goods we made available.

5. **Healthy friendships encourage a love of learning.**

   During the semester-long planning process, the YPs in our program gained a deep appreciation for each other's strengths and abilities. The weekly planning sessions evolved into animated, energetic brainstorming sessions frequently punctuated by laughter and amusement. This good will was then

shared with the youngsters who enrolled in the academy. The YPs, in turn, were openly appreciative and asked that we repeat the program—expressly for them—the following summer.

6. **The full support of the local school board and middle-school principals and counselors is indispensable for the smooth implementation and operation of the program.**

   Not every parent will welcome a letter inviting his or her child's participation in a program for struggling learners, but, if the program is actively endorsed by school officials, a significant number of concerned parents will be not only receptive but grateful.

Most importantly, we found that our initial instincts were right on target: university honors students are often well aware that they have been blessed with many gifts—intellect, character, and supportive relationships—and that, without these, their own lives would be much the poorer. They are eager to give back, and in doing so, those initial gifts are compounded to an immeasurable degree.

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APPENDIX A

Schedule for a Typical Day of the Neptune Academy

N.B. To allow for lessons in small groups to be conducted concurrently, the youngsters were divided into two teams, naming themselves the Blue Polar Bears and the Purple Moose.

8:00–9:00	Drop-Off/Breakfast/One-to-One Encounters
9:00–9:15	Theme for the Day: Integrity Doug Corbitt
9:15–9:30	Icebreakers Patrick Russell and Eric Wilson
9:30–10:30	Blue Polar Bears: "Photography" Corey Womack Purple Moose: "Finding Your Way" (Orienteering) Brandon Aist
10:30–10:45	Break
10:45–11:30	Purple Moose: "Ropes and Knots" Dietrich Ringle Blue Polar Bears: "Exploring the Map" Brandon Aist
11:45–12:30	Lunch
12:30–1:15	Reflection Time: "The Truth" Beth Estes
1:15–2:00	"Nature Songs" Katy Simers
2:00–2:15	Break
2:15–3:15	Purple Moose: "Photography" Corey Womack Blue Polar Bears: "Finding Your Way" (Orienteering) Brandon Aist
3:15–3:30	Break
3:30–4:15	Blue Polar Bears: "Ropes and Knots" Dietrich Ringle Purple Moose: "Exploring the Map" Brandon Aist
4:00–5:00	Recreation—Patrick Russell and Katy Simers

APPENDIX B

Registration Forms for Parents and Youngsters

(Student Form, Autobiography, Parent Form, Statement of Commitment)

Neptune Academy
University of Central Arkansas
Student Application Form

Personal Information

Name:_____
Last First Middle Nickname

Address: _____
Mailing Address City Zip Code

Phone #: _____Cell # : _____

Email address: _____

Date of Birth:_____ Male ____ Female ____

Ethnic Group (circle one):

1. Black/African American
2. American Indian-Alaskan Native
3. Asian
4. Hispanic
5. White or Caucasian
6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
7. More than one race

How did you hear about this program?

___ Counselor ___ Teacher ___ Word of Mouth ___ Other _____

In what areas can the Neptune Academy help you? (check all that apply and rank them in order of importance)

___ Improve my grades
___ Develop new interests
___ Improve my study skills
___ Meet new people
___ Discover my strengths
___ Learn about college
___ Identify my passions
___ Make friends
___ Engage in shared adventures and explorations
___ Investigate ways to turn my passions into a career or vocation
___ Other _____

Please check the subject areas that you find **most** enjoyable:

___English ___Science

___Social Studies ___Health and P.E.

___Math ___Art

___Foreign Language ___Band, Choir, or Orchestra

___Computer Technology ___Career Orientation

Please check the subject areas that you find **least** enjoyable:

___English ___Science

___Social Studies ___Health and P.E.

___Math ___Art

___Foreign Language ___Band, Choir, or Orchestra

___Computer Technology ___Career Orientation

STUDENT PLEDGE

If accepted by the University of Central Arkansas Neptune Academy, I will strive to be present for all program activities. I understand that failure to participate and to follow the rules of conduct and regulations of the program may result in loss of participation privileges.

_____ _____

Student's Signature Date

Autobiographical Information

(To be shared only with Neptune Academy directors and program leaders)

On this page, tell us a little about yourself. Be sure to include information about people who have had a significant impact on your life (e.g., parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, teachers, etc.). You may also wish to share your hobbies, abilities, talents, likes, dislikes, etc., and any other information that will help us know you. Please feel free to use both front and back of this page.

Neptune Academy
University of Central Arkansas
Parent Form

Father's Name _____ Occupation _____

Mailing Address _____

Place of Employment _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Highest Grade Completed: (Please circle)

Less than 9 10 11 12 College 1 2 3 4

Mother's Name _____ Occupation _____

Mailing Address _____

Place of Employment _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Highest Grade Completed: (Please circle)

Less than 9 10 11 12 College 1 2 3 4

Guardian/Step-Parent's Name _____ Occupation _____

Mailing Address _____

Place of Employment _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Highest Grade Completed: (Please circle)

Less than 9 10 11 12 College 1 2 3 4

Daytime Emergency Contact Information

Name _____ Relationship to Student _____

Place of Employment _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

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1. Why do you want your son/daughter to participate in The Neptune Academy? _____

   _____

   _____

2. What do you want your son/daughter to gain by participating in The Neptune Academy? _____

   _____

   _____

3. What are three words that describe your son/daughter? _____

   _____

   _____

4. How self-confident is your child? _____

   _____

   _____

5. In what areas would you most like to see your child improve while in the program? _____

   _____

   _____

6. What concerns do you have related to The Neptune Academy? _____

   _____

   _____

7. What disabilities, allergies, medical conditions, or serious challenges (if any) does your child face that we should know about? _____

   _____

   _____

If my son or daughter is accepted as a participant, I give my permission for him/her to attend all of the program activities. I understand that the Academy is fully insured against any accidents, illnesses or injuries that may result from participation.

Name of Parent or Guardian _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian _____ Date _____

Email Address of Parent or Guardian _____

Neptune Academy
University of Central Arkansas
Statement of Commitment

If you want to participate in the Neptune Academy, you are expected to commit yourself to the following requirements. Read the statements below and if you understand what is expected of you and can commit yourself to each requirement, please sign the form.

1. I will treat program leaders and participants with respect, courtesy, and consideration.
2. I will listen carefully and attentively while others are speaking.
3. I will obey all safety instructions and activity guidelines (e.g., rules for games).
4. I will make my best effort to be on time.
5. I will help clean up.
6. I will be friendly to all participants and refrain from any actions and words intended to hurt, embarrass, or isolate others.
7. I will respect the property of others (including University property).
8. I will participate fully in all of the scheduled activities (unless prevented by disabilities, allergies, etc.).
9. I will refrain from disruptive behavior.
10. I will refrain from any acts of violence and will not bring any weapons or controlled substances to campus or to the off-campus camping trip. (Exceptions will, of course, be made for physician-prescribed and/or over-the-counter medications. However, please inform us in advance of any medications your child may be taking.)
11. I will cooperate fully with program leaders' requests and directions.

I recognize and understand that failure to meet these requirements could result in my being dismissed from the Neptune Academy at any given time.

Signature of Student_____Date_____

I have read and understand the commitments that my child has agreed to fulfill in order to participate in the Neptune Academy. I support my child's involvement and will help and encourage him/her to achieve the guidelines outlined above.

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____Date_____

Please return the enclosed forms, along with a check for $75 (made payable to "The UCA Honors College") to the address below by July 24th. (You may wish to duplicate the forms and retain a copy for your records.)

Doug Corbitt, Director
Neptune Academy
UCA Honors College
P.O.Box 5024
Conway, Arkansas 72035

Be sure to mark "Neptune Academy" on the Memo line. (If you have already requested that your child be considered for a scholarship, please disregard payment instructions. If you have not already made such arrangements but payment would be a serious burden, please contact Doug Corbitt at 501-450-5131 or at dougc@uca.edu.)

APPENDIX C

Neptune Academy What-to-Expect Letter

Dear <<Parent's Name>>,

The start of the Neptune Academy is just under two weeks away, and we're all excited about meeting you and <<Student's Name>>. Here is some information about what to expect:

When: The Academy begins Sunday afternoon, August 9th and continues through Saturday afternoon, August 15th. **Registration and check-in will be between 1:30 and 2:00 p.m. Sunday afternoon in Farris Hall Lobby on the UCA campus.** (Please see the forthcoming map and the directions below.) Pick-up time on Sunday will be 8:30 p.m. at the front entrance to Farris Hall.

Where: The main entrance to Farris Hall will be place where you drop off and pick up <<Student's Name>> each morning and evening. The easiest way to reach Farris Hall is to take Farris Road to Students' Lane (just north of the Jewel E. Moore Nature Reserve and almost directly across from the Child Study Center on Farris Road). After you've turned east (toward campus) on Students' Lane, Farris Hall will be the first large building on your left. (If you take the second entrance into the Farris Hall parking lot, you'll be perfectly positioned to drop your child off curbside at the main entrance to the hall.)

What to Bring: Since many of our activities will take place outside, <<Student's Name>> will almost certainly want to bring **sunscreen, sunglasses, and a cap**. (In addition to lunch, we'll also be providing bottled water and snacks throughout the day, but if <<Student's Name>> has a favorite Nalgene water bottle or the like, <<he/she>> is welcome to bring it.) We recommend a **medium-sized spiral notebook** for taking notes and recording instructions and observations, **a couple of pencils and maybe a pen**, and **a "smallish" backpack.** If the weather is especially hot and humid, it might also be a good idea to bring **an extra T-shirt** each day in order to have the option of changing into cleaner, drier clothes after an out-of-doors activity. **Cell phones are permitted, but we kindly ask that their ring-styles be set to "Vibrate" and that, except in emergencies, students refrain from using them to text or to call others during instructional activities and games.**

What to Wear: **Shorts, T-shirts, and athletic shoes (or sturdy, comfortable hiking sandals).** A word of caution, however: The air conditioning in some of the buildings at UCA can be quite chilly during the summer. <<Student's Name>> may also want to bring **a light jacket**.

Week-day Schedule: Activities will begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 5:00 p.m. on Monday through Friday. However, if necessary, you can drop <<Student's

Name>> off as early as 8:00 a.m. and pick <<him/her>> up as late as 6:00 p.m. Between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. each morning there will be light breakfast foods available (e.g., doughnuts and orange juice).

Saturday (August 15th) Schedule: Activities will begin at 11:00 a.m. and wrap-up by 7:00 p.m. There will be a cook-out (to which parents are invited) at 5:00 p.m. More information to come.

Overnight Camping Trip (August 13th–14th): We had originally planned to transport the participants using two 15-passenger vans to a campground on the Buffalo National River, but due to a recent change in safety regulations, we are limited to 9 persons per van. As a result, we will not be able to offer the Night-on-the-Buffalo camping experience. (The university does not have enough vans available, and we do not have enough qualified drivers.) We are, instead, arranging an overnight trip to Woolly Hollow State Park. Woolly Hollow is close enough to Conway for us to use two vans to ferry all participants to the site while maintaining adult supervision of the entire group. **All camping supplies and food will be provided.** <<Student's Name>> need only bring **toiletries (there are facilities at the park), flashlight, pillow, a change of clothes, and desired snacks**.

I will be contacting you with more information as the time approaches, but please let me know if you have any specific questions I have not yet addressed. In the meantime, thank you for allowing <<Student's Name>> to participate in the Neptune Academy. We are so grateful to have this chance to get to know <<him/her>>.

Sincerely,

Doug Corbitt, Director
Neptune Academy
UCA Honors College